

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1944

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Week of April 10, 1944

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THEATRE OPENINGS

"Only the Heart"
"Public Relations"
"Chicken Every Sunday"
"Mrs. January and Mr. Ex"

Complete reviews appear in this issue
with a summary on the back page

*Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the
complete reviews as they originally appeared
in these New York newspapers*

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

"Public Relations"

Comedy by Dale Eunson; directed by Edward Childs Carpenter; setting by Stewart Chaney. Presented by Robert Blake at the Mansfield Theatre, April 6, 1944.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
April 7, 1944

A Hollywood Drama Opens at Mansfield

By BURTON RASCOE

THE audience didn't seem to be able to get all steamed up over Dale Eunson's inside story of domestic life in Hollywood during the opening of *Public Relations* at the Mansfield last night. What few risible impulses they had were distinctly 4-F and they sat on their hands. . . . I thought it was a bore, too.

The play stars Ann Andrews and Philip Merivale. They have roles in which they, who were the Great Sweethearts of the silent movies and "America's Most Happily Married Pair," have gone their separate ways (after a friendly divorce). Miss Andrews has remarried and is now the principal stockholder and the main squeeze of a formidable movie company. Mr. Merivale, retired, has just returned from a Good Will tour of South America, bringing back as an earnest of his good will, a sultry senorita of 18 (Yolanda Ugarte), whom he has picked in a night spot in Rio and married.

The divorced pair still jointly own The White House, a huge mansion in Beverly Hills to which gasping movie fans make pilgrimages as to a shrine. Although Miss Andrews still resides at this mausoleum with her new husband, Mr. Merivale has no hesitancy about bringing his new encumbrance there to live, because there is room for 20 families.

Knife Is Whetted

With that fine instinct which former wives sometimes have toward their ex-husbands, Anita Salvrea (Miss Andrews) immediately gets her knife out for the senorita. There is another complication: a son of this ideal marriage, just starting his career as a juvenile star of the present day, has been married only seven months and—yet, a chip off the old block, already is being blackmailed by a torch-singer named Bubbles, in whose apartment he committed the error of waking up one morning. And just for good measure, there is a daughter of this marriage, entirely forgotten by Maxwell himself, who has married an incipient politician in a small town, a candidate for a county clerkship. This couple shows up because the Maxwell daughter wants her baby to be born in The White House (and also because Mr. Eunson probably thought a little comedy stuff about pregnancy and the nervous father would be a treat to New York theatergoers).

Off-Stage Action

The trouble with the play, which you can see offers possibilities, either for serious dramatic or for satiro-comic treatment, is that Mr. Eunson hasn't yet learned that you can't let all your drama happen off stage and try to make the cast tell the audience about it, if you wish to sustain interest. The action in the two major crises of *Public Relations*—the one involving the fight between Anita and Dolores and the one involving the mixup between young Maxwell (Michael Ames) and Bubbles (Lynette Browne)—takes place almost entirely off stage; the audience has to learn about it at second hand.

This fault leads to another one: many of the lines do not proceed from the character or from the situation; they are mere wordy, unnatural indirect explanations to the audience. Moreover, the phone is used excessively to fill in the narrative, which should take place on stage. There are at least six characters that would be omitted if Mr. Eunson were a better craftsman; they merely clutter up and confuse the action.

One of these unnecessary characters, however, gave a warm glow (which had nothing

THE CAST

Martin, the caretaker.....	Owen Coll
Sophie Sawyer.....	Suzanne Jackson
Nancy Mason.....	Frances Henderson
David Robinson.....	Bradford Hunt
Mr. Bartlett.....	James Russo
Maurice Maxwell.....	Michael Ames
Anita Sawyer.....	Ann Andrews
Wallace Maxwell.....	Philip Merivale
Dolores Maxwell.....	Yolanda Ugarte
Girl Reporter.....	Joan Beard
Madge Torrance.....	Betty Blythe
Eleanor Hollis.....	Virginia Sherry
Frank Hollis.....	Mason Adams
Hubbles.....	Lynette Browne

to do with the play) to some of us. It is the part of a retired actress played by Betty Blythe, whom some of us fondly remember as the Queen of Sheba and one of the most seductive sirens (not excluding Theda Bara) of the nickelodeons. She has been absent from the stage and screen for 23 years, living happily married on a ranch. She was a whiff of nostalgic perfume to our nostrils—and, in my opinion, the best performer on the stage last night, the most natural, believable and assured. . . . The play is further handicapped by being uncertainly directed, especially in the parts assigned to Miss Andrews, Mr. Ames and Miss Browne.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
April 7, 1944

'Public Relations' At the Mansfield

By ROBERT GARLAND

TICK, TACK, TOE. Three in a row. And last night's new number at the Mansfield is no better than the others. If possible, "Public Relations" has even less to offer than "Only the Heart" or "Chicken Every Sunday." Plays about Hollywood, written by Hollywoodians, are apt to be Hollywoodian. Falling firmly and flatly into this West Coast category, Dale Eunson's "new comedy" is most certainly no exception.

And this despite the fact that Ann Andrews and Philip Merivale are co-starred in it; that Betty Blythe is among their supporting players; that Stewart Chaney designed the handsome Beverly Hills background; that Edward Childs Carpenter is responsible for the direction. . . . Apparently, there was nothing any one of these celebrities could do about "Public Relations." If there were, he quite obviously didn't do it.

Hollywooden

Such a story as "Public Relations" tells concerns an old Hollywood family which might be the Pickford-Fairbanks setup—but which, of course, it isn't. This family queens-and-kings it over Hollywood in an old family mansion, which might be Pickfair—but which, of course, isn't. How could it be when the old family mansion is known as "The White House," and the inhabitants are Anita Sawyer and Wallace Maxwell?

What happens when Anita and her new husband, Wallace, and his new wife, their children and their children's wives and husbands get together in "The White House," shouldn't happen to a moving picture actor. There's even a baby born off-stage, accompanied by the pre-"Chicken Every Sunday" gag about no doctor having ever lost a father. . . . But let's forget about "Public Relations" and write about something a good deal more pleasant.

NEW YORK TIMES
April 7, 1944

THE PLAY IN REVIEW "Public Relations"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

DALE EUNSON steadfastly clings to the belief that multiple marriages in Hollywood form pretty hilarious stuff for the East Coast stage. Maybe so, maybe so. But in his "Public Relations," which Robert Blake brought to the Mansfield last evening, he has failed to prove the point. For that play is composed of wisps of dialogue which move with the celerity of middle-aged snails, and the cast which delivers them finds the whole thing completely hopeless. Mr. Eunson's comedy is one of the talkiest in a season which has not been noted for peaceful reflection, and it certainly is one of the slowest.

The characters are a couple of Hollywood figures who as a team in the movies and marriage have been an American legend. Divorced, they have married elsewhere, but they keep a partnership in their old home, which they call the "White House." What could be funnier than the idea of the couple, with new wives and husbands, coming back to the old place, coming back along with sundry children from even earlier marriages? The answer to that one is many things could be a lot funnier, including "Public Relations." Ann Andrews and Philip Merivale find themselves faintly foolish in unsuitable parts, and some of the other players, it is to be feared, are a bit worse off than merely foolish. Edward Childs Carpenter directed, but did not save.

"Public Relations" is another play from which the attendance diminished during the evening. That isn't a good sign on the East Coast stage.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
April 7, 1944

Hollywood Really Can Be Funny—But It Isn't in 'Public Relations'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

MORE is known about Hollywood, both as a locality and as a state of mind, than about any other place in the world—Washington included. More is known and down on the record about its people than about any other group of human beings. But, for some unfathomable reason, hardly anybody can write a good play about Hollywood.

The men who wrote the best comedy—George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, authors of "Once in a Lifetime"—had never been to Movieland. Dale Eunson, who wrote last night's "Public Relations," has worked in Filmville on and off upward of 20 years, yet his comedy is not funny and his characters are dummies. Such a paradox doesn't make sense—but there it is.

Might Be Pickfair

I don't think "Public Relations" is "about" any real people. It might have been better if it were, but it would have to be many times better to arouse more than a yawn. In it, Ann Andrews and Philip Merivale are a one-time queen and king of Hollywood, now di-

voiced, and remarried, who find themselves together again in their old palace. I suppose this million-dollar hovel could be Pickfair and Miss Andrews and Mr. Merivale could be Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, but I'm not going to work my imagination that hard just to help out a playwright.

It's quite the thing these days to have to help out playwrights and most of the assistance has been coming from actors. Every time they have half a chance Miss Andrews, Mr. Merivale and Betty Blythe give "Public Relations" a lift and Miss Andrews in particular gives thrust and good timing to what comedy comes her way. But the chances don't come often enough.

Babies—More Babies!

The plot involves more than enough persons, including an 18-year-old bride of the ageing ex-king (she's a Broadway tomato who pretends she's Spanish), an unimaginative manager, a couple of young stars who are having marriage troubles, another star of the silent days who now raises chickens and downs whisky in the San Fernando Valley, a blackmailing chorus girl—and, what do you think?—a young couple from Iowa who come to the big house to have their baby, and they have it during a blackout. I've had so many babies this season I'm ready to have puppies. Stewart Chaney's cool and spacious setting looks like authentic Beverly Hills, but "Public Relations" doesn't. Edward Childs Carpenter did the directing.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

April 7, 1944

Strictly a Boomerang

By HOWARD BARNES

A ROYAL FAMILY of Hollywood is the subject of a dull travesty at the Mansfield. "Public Relations" is as dissonant and unimaginative as a Bronx cheer. There is plenty to make fun of in the fishbowl lives of movie celebrities, even when they have passed into comparative obscurity. Dale Eunson has written about recognizable characters and has called the turn on the well known idiosyncrasies of the stars, but he has not generated any fun. As a matter of fact, his play is so labored and static that it makes a badly written fan-magazine article seem inspired.

The chief characters in the so-called comedy are a faded star who has invested her earnings wisely and her ex-husband, who has banged around the world and kept his muscles toned up in the hope that the deriding films of the silent era will be revived. They wrangle over the palace which they own jointly, get a son out of a scrape with a blackmailing extra and talk small talk interminably. Whatever satirical quality may have been intended in the show is smothered in dreary speeches and situations. Film notable, get a break with "Public Relations." The latest Broadway offering makes their business look definitely superior.

Certainly no one ever met in Hollywood was so crashing a bore as most of the people who parade across the Mansfield stage. The queen of the movie colony, as played by Ann Andrews, has all the dimensions of a paper doll and somewhat less color. Philip Merivale wrestles wryly with the part of the errant ex-husband, making him foolish enough, but at no times laughable. The stars are stopped dead in their tracks at every tiny turn of the plot by a deplorable script.

The other unlucky participants in the production are no better off. Michael Ames and

Frances Henderson try to make something out of a second generation of west coast aristocracy; Betty Blythe does everything, but turn cartwheels as an ex-glamour girl and Yolanda Ugarte fakes a Spanish accent unconvincingly as the new wife of the aging star. Edward Childs Carpenter leads the company through its paces sidlingly enough in his direction, but the cast has nowhere to go. Hollywood nonsense is always a rich subject for hilarious stage lampooning, as "Queer People" or "Once in a Lifetime" demonstrated. This theatrical whatnot is strictly a boomerang.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM

April 7, 1944

Be Glad You Weren't There

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

ANOTHER one like *Public Relations*, and they'll be putting bars on my windows. Mr. Eunson's play must surely be one of the most dismal transactions that ever commanded the services of a generally well-known cast. It is completely silly and unpleasant and stupefyingly dull.

A comedy about Hollywood, *Public Relations* is chiefly concerned with a divorced, middle-aged pair who were once Hollywood's most renowned film combination. Each has remarried, but the two of them still jointly own a fabulous Hollywood mansion where a large cast congregates—themselves, their new spouses, married sons who carry on with floosies, married daughters who start having babies during blackouts, sons-in-law, mothers-in-law, and nymphomaniacs. There is a full state of infidelities, catfishes, upstage acts, wrangles, and reconciliations. Perhaps all this is meant to satirize Hollywood, or even skin it alive. Perhaps it is merely meant to be diverting. But since nothing really happens, nobody is faintly real, and not one line of dialogue is exhilarating, it clearly doesn't matter.

Ann Andrews, Philip Merivale, Frances Henderson and a lot of others stuck out the evening with more grit than skill. I don't imagine *Public Relations* will occupy much space in any of their autobiographies.

THE NEW YORK SUN

April 7, 1944

'Public Relations,' One of the Very Worst, Presented at the Mansfield

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE drama got nowhere last night at the Mansfield. Actually, it took several steps backward and one of its worst beatings with the presentation of an incredibly laborious play called "Public Relations." Robert Blake, making his bow as a Broadway producer, is the incantations showman who brings it forth.

When I saw that interesting play of two seasons ago, "Guest in the House," it was my impression that its authors, Dale Eunson and Hagar Wilde, would do even better with their next. But now Mr. Eunson, going it alone, has missed the trick. He must try again. His "Public Relations" is one of the season's worst.

Here you have a fable of the commotion and complications that come about when two famous stars of the silent screen, who have been divorced, reoccupy their former home,

the White House (Beverly Hills show place) after both have remarried. In the role of the once glamorous Anita Sawyer you find Ann Andrews and it's Philip Merivale, who appears as Wallace Maxwell, screen idol of another day. Both Miss Andrews and Mr. Merivale have done important work in the local theater. I can't explain how they happen to be associated with the new exhibit at the Mansfield, and, incidentally, they do nothing for it.

The cast also includes Betty Blythe (in person); Frances Henderson, making her first Broadway appearance; and Michael Ames, of a recent disaster known as "Mrs. Kimball Presents."

Stewart Chaney's pretty scenery is badly lighted and, as for the direction of Edward Childs Carpenter, it should be said in the cause of gentleness that Mr. Carpenter is an amiable fellow who has been long in the theater and who has written two or three Broadway hits.

"Public Relations" is in three acts (they seemed long ones) and all the action takes place in the living room of that California White House.

Sorry, Mr. Eunson. But "Public Relations" is not long for this world—or for West 47th street.

NEW YORK POST

April 7, 1944

Hollywood Couldn't Be So Dull As 'Public Relations' at Mansfield

By WILELLA WALDORF

BETTY BLYTHE spent most of the second act of "Public Relations" at the Mansfield Theatre last night stretched out on the couch in a state of coma. Many persons in the firstnight audience knew just how she felt put, lacking couches, found it necessary to sit upright until nearly 11 o'clock, staring at Stewart Chaney's decorative set.

Dale Eunson apparently wrote "Public Relations" with the intent of showing us all how dull Hollywood high life can be. He gives us a week-end at the White House in Beverly Hills, erstwhile home of the first family of filmdom. Anita Sawyer, and Wallace Maxwell, aging stars, have both married again since their divorce, but that doesn't stop them from being fond of each other.

Ann Andrews and Philip Merivale play the stars, both showing considerable strain, which is no wonder when you consider Mr. Eunson's dialogue. Possibly he just wandered into a few homes out there and wrote down what people said. When nothing else seemed to be going on, there were long telephone conversations with Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper.

While this dismal piece dragged on we wondered periodically why some producer doesn't find a decent role for Ann Andrews, who not only looks very elegant but has a wonderful way with her when it comes to getting off lines. She even managed to make one or two of Mr. Eunson's seem almost witty.

More about "Public Relations" we shall not say except to issue a stern warning to theatregoers to shun it. The only people to whom it can safely be recommended are strong, healthy parents and their young and flighty daughters who have heard how thrilling Hollywood is and might be tempted to run away from home to become "Baby Stars." After listening to "Public Relations" for a few minutes the girls should be quite willing to go quietly back to school.

"Only the Heart"

Play by Horton Foote; directed by Mary Hunter; settings by Frederick Fox. Presented by The American Actors Theatre at the Bijou Theatre, April 4, 1944.

NEW YORK POST
April 5, 1944

American Actors Theatre Brings 'Only the Heart' to the Bijou Theatre

By WILELLA WALDORF

HORTON FOOTE is the favorite son of the organization known as the American Actors Theatre, which has been producing his plays in such out-of-the-way places as West 19th St. and the Provincetown Playhouse for some time past. All of Mr. Foote's works that we happen to have encountered—"Texas Town," "Out of My House" and "Only the Heart"—have been labeled "promising," and after seeing "Only the Heart" presented in revised form last night at the Bijou Theatre, we must reluctantly lag in the same old adjective. Mr. Foote is still just "promising."

When "Only the Heart" was produced on the little Provincetown stage in December, 1942, it had six characters. In the new version which reached Broadway last night it has five. Sooney, Mr. Borden's Negro mistress in the original play, has ceased to exist. Not only is she absent from the stage. She is no longer a Negro. Mr. Borden is now keeping "a Bohemian woman" somewhere across the railroad tracks.

This nervous subterfuge renders some of Mamie Borden's wild talk about "the Klan" a trifle less understandable than it was before, but otherwise makes little difference to the play itself, which is still substantially as it was, though outfitted with a new Broadway cast. The time is now 1921 instead of 1935, giving June Walker and her fellow players a chance to wear something approaching "period" costumes.

The Pursuit of Happiness

Mr. Foote's picture of an embittered, unhappy, domineering woman who attempts to run the lives of her family with depressing results, would make an engrossing study for any up-and-coming psychiatrist, and the play gives its audience a chance to ponder upon such questions as what constitutes true happiness and how much material success means in this uncertain life.

Heinrich Heine's "They flourish and flourish from year to year, and only the heart is withered and sore" gives the author his title.

The American Actors Theatre, making its bow on Broadway, is professionally adept. Mary Hunter's direction and Frederick Fox's settings are good, and the five players are all well cast. Miss Walker, as the frustrated and frantic Mamie Borden, acts with her usual intelligence and it is hardly her fault that such a role is likely to become somewhat exhausting as time goes on, not only for the actress but for the audience.

Psycho-analyzing Mamie

Mamie is a bundle of neuroses. Moss Hart could probably write a whole dream ballet about her case, with battalions of psychiatrists in attendance. Doubtless in his version everything would turn out all right after it was finally discovered that somebody stole Mamie's pink rattle right out of her crib when she was still too young to assert her right to the property.

Will Hare and Eleanor Anton are attractively youthful and appealing as the daughter and son-in-law, while Mildred Dunnock and Maurice Wells play Aunt India and the scandalous Mr. Borden effectively.

"Only the Heart" is good enough to interest students of the theatre who appreciate careful craftsmanship, and Mr. Foote, though still only promising, has his points as a dramatist. If the American Actors Company is

THE CAST

India Hamilton.....	Mildred Dunnock
Julia Borden.....	Eleanor Anton
Mamie Borden.....	June Walker
Albert Price.....	Will Hare
Mr. Borden.....	Maurice Wells

to charge the current Broadway prices, however, it will probably have to find a play with more to offer a Broadway audience than "Only the Heart."

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
April 5, 1944

'Only the Heart' Has June Walker, but It Needs One More Act

By JOHN CHAPMAN

NOT since Tallulah Bankhead was in "The Little Foxes" has there been a woman one would like to bat down quite so much as June Walker in last night's new play, "Only the Heart." But Miss Bankhead was inherently vicious and Miss Walker is just a poor female who doesn't know any better, so Miss Walker's character is less important dramatically.

Not important, either, is Horton Foote's play, "Only the Heart" is a simple job, simply and obviously written, which is made interesting for two acts by the playing of Miss Walker, Eleanor Anton and Will Hare—and, I suspect, by the direction of Mary Hunter.

At one point Miss Walker—a go-getting female of no sensibilities—wails, "What have I done to deserve this?" So corny a line would rate a loud phooey from the customers under corny circumstances, but last night's first-nighters took it and believed it because up to then the goings-on had been pretty human. It wasn't until the third act that the plot began to get stagey.

Manages Daughter, Too

Miss Walker is a small-town Texas terror of the year 1921. The wife of a no-good husband, she has kept her head if not her heart busy by working and scheming at business. She does all right, managing tenant farmers and striving toward an oil strike on some of her property—and her daughter is just something else to be mahaged, too. For the daughter she picks as a husband a shy and socially clumsy bank clerk who also has a head for business.

For two acts the play is reasonably engrossing and often touching, because four of its five characters are yearning for something. The mother is yearning because her life is empty, even though she doesn't know it. The daughter is yearning because she wants fun and romance. A spinster aunt is yearning because she's a spinster aunt, and the young husband—who seems awfully dopey for a lad who is supposed to have a good business head—lets himself be enthralled by the mother and worries in a fuzzy way because his wife is unhappy.

The only solution, of course, is for the young people to cut loose from Ma, and this they finally do. But the cutting-loose is achieved so undramatically that it is a let-down. Miss Walker, after all her scheming, is left with nothing but a lousy oil well to occupy her mind, but nobody told her off the way she should have been told off. Even her husband, all fired out from being a failure and from living with a more interesting woman on the

side, neglects the chance to speak his mind. The play just drifts away.

Miss Walker Welcome

It is good to have June Walker back on the stage again, speaking a dialect which might be Texas, Iowa or Erie Canal and not being afraid to lend her talents to a rather thankless role. Eleanor Anton is a most submissive daughter, and Will Hare is a convincing example of hesitancy as the young husband. Mildred Dunnock has a standard spinster aunt role, consisting of a few words and many gestures of frustration, and Maurice Wells has the useless part of the father. Setting and costumes by Frederick Fox are excellent.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
April 5, 1944

'Only The Heart' New Bijou Stage Offering

By ROBERT GARLAND

IT took a couple of seasons for Horton Foote's "Only the Heart" to grope its way from the Provincetown Theatre, down by W. 3rd st., to the Bijou, up on W. 45th. In transit it has picked up a scene and lost a character. Frankly, I can't see that either the addition or the subtraction makes a lot of difference where Mr. Foote's mother-and-son mix-up is concerned.

According to programs, "Only the Heart" is not the author's first venture as a dramatist. He has written "Texas Town," "Wharton Dance," "Out of My House" and "Daisy Lee." But playwrighting isn't all Mr. Foote is also an actor. He has appeared in "Shroud My Body Down," "Minnie Fields," "Fifth Column" and his own "Texas Town." When, where and why, Bijou programs do not say. Maybe they haven't heard. Anyway, they don't tell you.

But I can tell you that if Henrik Ibsen had lived in Texas and had written Sidney Howard's "The Silver Cord" at a very early age, it might have sounded like "Only the Heart" sounded last night in 45th st.

Return Ticket?

In passing be it noted that "Only the Heart" was brought—practically carried—up town through the financial assistance of Katharine Cornell, Margaret Webster, Howard Lindsay, Eva Le Gallienne, Peggy Wood and Thornton Wilder. After sitting it out last night in the beautiful new Bijou it is in me to hope that these theatrical worthies have held out enough of what-it-takes to cart the opus back again.

Produced this time by the American Actors Theatre, of which the author, Horton Foote, happens to be executive director, "Only the Heart" is sponsored in a new way by Hortense Alden, Bertram—hi-ya, Bertram, when did you change your name?—Bloch, Lief Erickson, James T. Farrell, John Gassner, Arthur Hopkins, Lynn Riggs, Akim Tamiroff and the John Hustons. But it's no more believable for all this high-class sponsoring. What's indicated is a play.

At the Bijou they haven't got a play. Even in "The Silver Cord," best of all mother-complex dramas, Mr. Phelps doesn't descend to lying to keep her son both on her side and by her bedside. Mamie Borden does.

Let June Do It

Miss Cornell, Miss Webster, Miss LaGallienne, Miss Wood, Miss Alden and Mrs. John Huston, having financed "Only the Heart" on to the Broadway scene, graciously step aside and lay the work in June Walker's now

ample lap. These famed footlight ladies are sure Mr. Foote's last play is good. But they aren't sure that Mr. Foote's play is good enough for them to act in. "Let June do it" is their selfish slogan.

So June does it. June Walker did it last night at the Bijou. She did it upstage, downstage and in her Texas parlor. She did it well; she did it better than any other out-of-a-job actress could possibly have done it. She worked as hard and, to all appearances, as happily as she worked in "The Farmer Takes a Wife"—which, believe me, will some day turn out to be the best of all-American operatic libretti.

If "Only the Heart" wants a promotion line from me, print "Garland says 'Pretentious'."

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM April 5, 1944

Only the Heart Is Fine Domineering Mother Study

By BURTON RASCOE

ONLY THE HEART, by Horton Foote, which opened at the Bijou last night, is a skilfully written and excellently acted retreatment of the ancient theme of the dominating mother. It is not thrilling at any point nor is it emotionally moving except in one scene in the last act, but it is absorbingly interesting and satisfying.

To the older generation who remember vividly The Silver Cord and antecedent plays with a similar theme, Only the Heart may be old stuff, but the subject is a perdurably important one and therefore to young people of marriageable age or in the early stages of marriage I can recommend no play of the season more earnestly. Serious attention upon the message of the play may save them many a heartache and even disaster.

Although not as powerful a play as The Silver Cord, it is, in one particular, a better one, for it deals with an ordinary, middle-class family and therefore hits home with a great many more people than did the famous Sidney Howard drama, in which the blood-sucking old widow, who enervated and warped the soul of one son and came near wrecking the life of another, was very rich and thus held still another vicious whip over her offspring, whom she made dependent upon her and in whom she had cunningly implanted the belief that they were parasitically unable to function without her and without the money they were to inherit from her.

Plans Others' Lives

The mother in Only the Heart is neither rich nor a member of an old, distinguished family (two factitious circumstances which have been used in other plays and novels in kind in order to make the mother seem the more hateful to those of us whose parents were humble and undistinguished); she is just an ordinary, middle-class sort of mother, in whom fear of poverty and a desire for security have been so firmly implanted by unhappy experience that she loses sight of the deeper values in life and concentrates destructively—but with the best intentions—upon planning the life of her daughter "for her own good."

And there disaster lies. Mothers ambitious for their sons and daughters, or for one particular son or one particular daughter, often do "know best" (at least a kind of a "best") and push a talented son or daughter ruthlessly to the top in some trade or profession and enjoy through him or her a vicarious life of glory and achievement; but in doing so they often kill something fine and individual in their talented offspring and direct them into cheap, quick successes that become ashes in their children's mouths.

In like fashion, but in a less spectacular degree, the Mamie Borden of this, our native

land, are especially fearful that their daughters will marry "the wrong sort," a boy who is known to take a drink now and then and to be spontaneously gay and not eager to get down to the assumption of serious responsibilities. In a small town their caution has always a sound basis in social and economic logic. But it can become so fixed an idea with them, a preoccupation so woven about with middle-class clichés of virtue and respectability as to tend to destroy the very souls of everyone who should be close and dear to them.

June Walker Excellent

Only the Heart is about such a woman—not, essentially, a mean or vicious sort, not a monster, but just a vigorous, full-blooded, normal, well-intentioned woman of great determination, in whom all real love, tenderness, human sympathy and tolerance have been severely repressed. She wrecks the lives of her husband and a sister and subjects her daughter and later her son-in-law to her ruthless will, resorting even, in one brief but terrific scene, to an Iago-like implanting of suspicions about the virtue of her own daughter in the mind of the hapless boy she wishes to keep under her thumb. Even at the final curtain (for this is an honest play) she is confidently planning victory in her apparent defeat.

The play brings a mature and developed June Walker back to Broadway after a long absence in a role she sustains with laudable realism. But everyone in the cast of five is unusually good. A special high tribute, however, must be paid Will Hare for one of the finest performances of the year as the bewildered boy troubled with an acute sense of inferiority. Mary Hunter's direction seemed faultless to me, and Frederick Fox's setting, costumes and lighting are in perfect key with the time, the place and the story.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM April 5, 1944

Very Earnest And Very Dull

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

FEW things are more depressing in the theater than earnestness wedded to mediocrity. An utterly bad play can be almost exhilarating in its badness, and can even contrive, now and then, to stumble on something unusual. But the play that springs of a mind as arid as it is serious, that always shows purpose and never shows talent, that is as precise as a diagram in its planning, and as dull as a diagram in its effect, can only leave you weary. It can only leave you unhappy, too, for an author who tried hard to no avail.

Only the Heart is perhaps the season's most plodding effort. It has a grim theme, and Mr. Foote tackles it with grim determination. He knows what he wants to show, and he shows it over and over again. The demonstration is pretty crude and obvious to begin with, and it becomes monotonous as it continues.

Mr. Foote is concerned with a woman of terrific drive who, because she does not know how to love, can only maneuver and dominate. Having long ago messed up her marriage and spoiled her sister's romance, Mamie Borden now goes to work on her daughter. First she chooses Julia a husband, and then starts destroying the young couple's life together. But Julia, warned by her aunt that it is only love, only the heart, that counts, finally bolts; and her husband bolts after her. Mamie, though momentarily defeated, remains indomitable.

Mamie is an all too recurrent figure in drama and by now she requires a good deal more than Mr. Foote can give her. She is indeed too crudely conceived to be psychologically interesting, and too obviously portrayed to be dramatically at all exciting. Nor are the people around her anything better than serviceable. The whole play has the

awful competence of mediocrity. There is never a revealing twist of character, never an unexpected yet convincing turn of plot; while the dialogue lacks freshness and tension.

Perhaps with a first-rate production Only the Heart might have taken on a certain amount of life and intensity. But the actual production is sadly ineffective. Mary Hunter's direction seems stiff, and several of the actors awkward. As Mamie, June Walker plays with little variety and by no means enough force. Probably the brightest touch of the evening is Frederick Fox's set.

THE NEW YORK TIMES April 5, 1944

Pistol Packin' Mama

By LEWIS NICHOLS

SINCE 1938 the America Actors Theatre has been wooing the muse good naturedly in studios, meeting halls and such places as the Provincetown Playhouse. Last evening it took the plunge and came uptown to the Bijou, where it offered Horton Foote's "Only the Heart," which it had tried out a year or so ago down on MacDougal Street and with another cast. The group possibly may get credit for an ambition lying in the right direction, but it can receive none on the score of judgment. For this drama about money as the root of all evil—in 1921 in Texas, at least—is not a Broadway play in the usual sense of that word. It might get by elsewhere as an exercise, but on Forty-fifth Street it is talky, old fashioned and dull.

Mr. Foote's chief character is a woman who amassed some wealth during the last war and who grew interested in wealth and allowed her husband to look elsewhere for happiness. She persuades her daughter to marry the young man the woman thinks will be best for her, not the one she wants. The girl finally decides, after much talk and little action, that the second generation had better get away to Houston before another marriage collapses, and her young husband shows enough energy at the end to follow her. The woman is left with her telephone and an announcement that an oil well has come in and she is rich, even richer.

The author has scraped the bones of this plot rather than padding them. His Mamie Borden is not clearly drawn; she is mean, but not sufficiently mean to arouse contempt or horror, and an audience is likely to care nothing much about her either way. She lacks the forthright approach of Lizzie B., who disposed of people with forty whacks. The daughter is colorless and the son-in-law, and the action is sleepy. June Walker plays the role of Mamie, and in what must be an honest endeavor to speed up "Only the Heart" she whirls around the stage like a dervish. Mildred Dunnock gives a good enough performance in the part of Mamie's sister and Eleanor Anton and Will Hare are the young people.

At the Provincetown Playhouse "Only the Heart" had the advantage of not trying to be top professional, an advantage it gave away by moving uptown. The move was not wise.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE April 5, 1944

A Very Weak Heart

By HOWARD BARNES

IT is still a far cry from the experimental theater to Broadway. "Only the Heart," which captured considerable attention at the Provincetown Playhouse a season ago, demands scant applause at the Bijou. What

"Only the Heart" continued

may have seemed a striking and venomous stage study in Greenwich Village is merely listless on Forty-fifth Street. The theme is far from exciting, the dramatic structure is faltering, and the venom has been almost wholly extracted. It is quite possible that the standards of big-time production bear responsibility for a disappointing offering. Be that as it may, this Horton Foote drama is a dreary domestic tragedy as it stands.

The author's thesis is sound enough. He examines an embittered woman in a Texas town during the period of the early '20s, whose denial of love affects all those who come close to her. Having driven her husband into an unhappy liaison with an immigrant and her sister into apoplexy, she tries to destroy the happiness of her daughter. This is the stuff out of which more than one dynamic and moving play has been made. What Foote has failed to do is to implement his conflict of characters with plausible motivation and eloquent meaning. The ending happens to be vaguely happy for the daughter and her benighted husband, but it would have made little difference had the actress kept them in thrall.

The American Actors Theater, sponsor of the production, has not been wise in picking June Walker for the leading role. As a matter of fact, it is a lamentable bit of miscasting. The actress works like a Trojan to give the piece some quality of classic tragedy, but she succeeds in being neither convincingly evil nor ruefully sympathetic. It is just not the part for her. Whether she is taking over a son-in-law and poisoning his mind against her daughter, or driving herself into frenzied activity to forget the unhappiness of her existence, she is merely a bouncing, amiable matron.

Far more in the key of what Foote must

have thought he was composing are Eleanor Anton, in the part of the daughter and Will Hare, who plays the clumsy son-in-law. The former is always on the verge of firing a scene with passion and savage excitement. The plot never gives her a chance. Hare achieves a fairly substantial characterization, only to find that he is in a dead-end street. The staging of Mary Hunter does little to animate the proceedings. "Only the Heart" has glints of theatrical excitement, but far too few to make it shine in Longacre Square.

NEW YORK SUN

April 5, 1944

'Only the Heart,' Done at Bijou, Dreary Play of Texas Frustrations

By WARD MOREHOUSE

"ONLY THE HEART," previously tested in Macdougall street, moved into the Broadway competition last night, being installed at the Bijou, and there it will probably find the going tough. For, as played in its premiere performance upon the stage of the 45th street handbox, it is a grim and monotonous piece, providing a full evening of frustration.

Small-town drama it is, this play by Horton Foote, and it reveals a talent for both construction and characterization, but most of the piece is slow-moving, and two hours of the nagging, grasping and relentless Mamie Borden are hard to take. June Walker, in

the role of that bitter and exhausting landowner, is obviously cast against type, but she is miscast, nevertheless. I prefer Miss Walker as a comedienne.

Mr. Foote's locale is the small town of Richmond, Tex.; the time is the early 1920s. Mamie Borden has had no love in her life, but she has old land. She is a profiteer, and she manages and she meddles. She arranges the marriage of her young daughter to Albert, the boy in the bank. They move in with her and she proceeds to run their lives, especially Albert's. Finally, they walk out on her, but by this time Mamie's oil is coming in and her defeat seems by no means complete.

Miss Walker has long been one of this department's favorites in comedy roles. But she seems more of a hindrance than a help to "Only the Heart" or to the American Actors Theatre, which has sponsored it. As played by Miss Walker you never come to loathe the selfish, whining, and possessive Mamie. Nor do you become sorry for her or fascinated by her.

Will Hare, as the shy and gawky Albert, who had never gone with girls, who is talked into proposing and then comes to love and want his Julia, is natural and affecting. Eleanor Anton does well enough with the role of the daughter and a second-act scene that she has with Albert achieves real feeling. Maurice Wells is quite believable as Mamie's weak and beaten husband; so is Mildred Dunnock as frustrated sister. Mamie, you see, is quite a devastating old girl and it's trouble once you cross her path.

Frederick Fox contributes an excellent setting, the kind of living room and the kind of house you'd expect to find in that small, oil-country town.

"Only the Heart" is atmospheric and reveals honesty in its writing, but as drama it is dreary stuff and does not fulfill the promise it showed when done on the fringe of Washington Square.

"Chicken Every Sunday"

Comedy by Julius J. and Philip G. Epstein, based on the novel by Rosemary Taylor; directed by Lester Vail; settings by Howard Bay. Presented by Edward Gross at the Henry Miller Theatre, April 5, 1944.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

April 6, 1944

Under-Cooked

By HOWARD BARNES

THERE are funny and likable characters in "Chicken Every Sunday." Dressed in appropriate 1916 costumes, they engage in a variety of period pranks against an antic setting. Unfortunately, this saga of a Tucson boarding house finds them in the awkward predicament of posturing and making wisecracks when they might have been fashioning a richly comic chronicle of our past. The laugh lines in the new play at Henry Miller's Theater are too calculated for complete comfort. Even the stalwart clowning of Rhys Williams and Mary Phillips does not stamp the piece with more than desultory gaiety.

At its best, the Julius J. and Philip G. Epstein adaptation of Rosemary Taylor's novel achieves a sort of frenetic hilarity, with wacky folk rushing around the stage on preposterous errands. Even then the situations are diffuse, and it takes a major deus ex machina to yank the proceedings into a climax. For most of three acts the people of the play try to get by with unrelated gags, heavily seasoned with innuendo. The Brothers Epstein know the joke books. They should have backed up their gulps with more substantial dramatic nonsense. As a period bur-

THE CAST

Mrs. Lawson.....	Ethel Remey
Jeffrey Lawson.....	Hugh Thomas
Miss Gillee.....	Diana Rivers
Mr. Willard.....	Austin Coghlan
Emily Blachman.....	Mary Phillips
Evie May.....	Viola Dean
Jack.....	Roy Fant
Eagle.....	Marlin Skapik
Oliver Blachman.....	Guy Stockwell
Ruthie Blachman.....	Carolyn Hummel
Carlos.....	Tino Valenti
Rosemary Blachman.....	Jean Gillespie
Clem.....	Raymond Van Sickle
Mrs. Lynch (Miss Sally).....	Katherine Squire
Jim Blachman.....	Rhys Williams
Mr. Robinson.....	Fleming Ward
Rita Kirby.....	Ann Thomas
George Kirby.....	Frank M. Thomas
Harold.....	David McKay
Rev. Wilson.....	Wyrley Birch
Milly Moon.....	Hope Emerson

lesque, or as sheer fun, "Chicken Every Sunday" leaves a great deal to be desired.

There is little lacking in the performing. Williams is as forthrightly humorous as ever in the role of an Arizona dreamer, who is president of the horse-drawn trolley line and owner of the biggest laundry from Tucson to Los Angeles, but lets his wife run a boarding house to keep him solvent. Miss Phillips gives a superbly modulated caricature of his wife, mixing Southern aristocratic pride with a very practical running of her hostelry. There are moments when the featured players take things into their own hands and fashion a

small core of genuine comedy. Too often they are dependent on a running patter of slightly off-color sides which do nothing to enliven the show.

In their support are some excellent character actors. Roy Fant as a prospector, Raymond Van Sickle in the part of the horse-drawn trolley driver, Frank M. Thomas and Hope Emerson conceive lusty and amusing portraits, but the play itself rarely brings them into a sustained mood of merriment. Frequently you have to look around the stage to find them. Jean Gillespie and Hugh Thomas handle a comic-strip romance effectively enough and Katherine Squire is excellent as an old doll trying to look young in memory of her dead husband. The characters in "Chicken Every Sunday" are ready and set to go, but the play has them rushing off in all directions. Dollars to doughnuts that it will be much funnier in the movies.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM

April 6, 1944

Broadway Eats For a Change

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THOUGH it was pretty wintry along Broadway Wednesday night, inside the Henry Miller there were definite signs of Spring. *Chicken Every Sunday* is certainly no great shakes, but some of it is funny

and most of it is lively, and there's no earthly reason why it shouldn't be popular. A raucous comedy about boarding-house life in Arizona 20-odd years ago, parts of *Chicken Every Sunday* still have feathers on. In addition, when you're not looking smart, they try to serve you the pope's nose and a bit of the neck. But at least it's a meal. There haven't been many on Broadway lately.

I've not read Rosemary Taylor's book, but I suspect that the Messrs. Epstein used plenty of license—and paprika—in adapting it for the stage. In the book there must have been more boarding-house atmosphere and fewer booby-hatch antics; more nostalgia and less noise; a minimal regard for reality and some genuine feeling for character. On the stage *Chicken Every Sunday* romps off shamelessly—though helpfully—into farce, and gag farce at that. And it chases sex in all directions, upstairs, downstairs, and in several ladies' chambers. For rather more than good measure, there is even a dirty old man with a ditto mind, and a nymphomaniac who, following her second-act pursuit of an Indian, rather peculiarly dropped out of the story.

The central part of the action concerns Emily and Jim Blachman, who run the boarding house. It is also the best part. Emily is the practical, roof-preserving wife married to the windy, sky's-the-limit husband; of course they love each other and of course they quarrel. The parts are stereotypes, but the authors have built up some juicy scenes for them and thrown in some amusing lines. And Mary Phillips and Rhys Williams play them for all they are worth. From Mr. Williams' humorous, breezy impersonation of Jim you would hardly guess that, a few weeks back in the same theater, he was the absent-minded Lyman Stowe. Miss Phillips, who returns to Broadway after a long absence, offers one of the most engaging performances of the season. She gets every ounce of comedy out of her part without sacrificing its womanliness and warmth.

Chicken Every Sunday is a pretty spotty play. Lively incidents are interspersed with labored ones, and good gags with bad. There could be a little less sex without the evening's becoming exactly austere, and considerably less of the inevitable young love. The play, for one thing, is too long. Cutting shouldn't be hard and would certainly be helpful.

Lester Vail has done a good job of direction, keeping things moving and not too cluttered. Most of the minor roles are well played by, among others, Katherine Squire, Ann Thomas, and Hope Emerson. And Howard Bay's set is properly weird.

THE NEW YORK POST
April 6, 1944

'Chicken Every Sunday' Opens—Louder and Cruder Than the Book

By WILLELLA WALDORF

THE Brothers Epstein of Hollywood have fallen upon Rosemary Taylor's book, "Chicken Every Sunday," with a butcher knife and a pair of shears, cut it up into small, unrelated pieces, added a heavy dose of their own special seasoning and reassembled the mixture into a crude and rather tiresome farce produced last night at Henry Miller's Theatre.

The book, which is full of humor, atmosphere and charm, has been referred to as "Life With Mother's Boarders." The play at Henry Miller's, however, is only distantly related in mood to the current "Life With Father." Cast more in the mold of "You Can't Take It With You," it is constantly straining for laughs which, when they come, are guffaws.

Howard Bay's setting, the living room of the Blachman home in Tucson, Ariz., in the year 1916, is good for a few appreciative smiles on its own when the curtain goes up, and some of the funnier lines from the book are put over effectively at odd moments.

But instead of the entertaining, yet human, boarders, who came and went over a period of years at the Blachman home in Tucson, the stage is peopled with a gang of freaks bent upon being as aggressively unusual as possible.

As the play progressed, it became increasingly evident that, while many of the events and persons described in the original story are entangled somewhere in the melee, the tone is different. Mrs. Taylor dealt in personalities and anecdotes. The Brothers Epstein give the impression that they are more interested in backslides and leers.

More Blatant for Broadway

Possibly they are convinced that by translating "Chicken Every Sunday" into the more blatant style of Broadway, they have assured themselves of success at the box office. Doubtless they are right. Judging from the guffaws that greeted some of the "wow" lines last night, many people in the first-night audience were all but overcome with mirth.

For our part, we should have preferred to see the book treated with more appreciation and understanding of its own particular charm, or left between covers.

Lester Vail directed the rumpus in the spirit in which it was conceived by the dramatists, and the large company acted with all the fervor it was able to summon amid the confusion.

Although she hardly indicated old Virginia ancestry, Mary Phillips played Mother in her usual warm, understanding style, and Rhys Williams caricatured Father as little as possible considering the circumstances. The rest were violently or mildly freakish, depending upon their opportunities.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
April 6, 1944

'Chicken Every Sunday' a Goofy Cavalcade in a Boarding House

By JOHN CHAPMAN

IF you took some of the weird relatives I Ruth McKenney used to write about, mixed in some of "You Can't Take It With You" and decided to call the whole thing "Life With Mother," you might have a funny play if you were lucky and smart. Hollywood's screenwriting brothers, the Epsteins, are even luckier and smarter, and their "Chicken Every Sunday" makes a fine goofy evening at Henry Miller's theatre.

The Epsteins, Julius J. and Phillip G., didn't have to go borrowing and stealing here and there. They had a book by Rosemary Taylor—also called "Chicken Every Sunday"—to work from, and it is plenty. Out of its pages and onto the stage has come a human zoo which makes no more sense than a barrel of monkeys and is just as much fun.

Had the comedy been called "Life With Mother," Mother would be Mary Phillips, who manages three children, a husband who must be a direct descendant of Col. Sellers, and a boarding house with eleven rooms and one bath in Tucson, Ariz. The time is 1916.

Meet All the People

Miss Phillips' husband—called Jim Blachman in the story—is Rhys Williams, who is owner of the town laundry, president of the horse-drawn street car line and vice president of a bank. But this is hardly enough for security, so Miss Phillips operates her home as a boarding house and is not above swiping

from the overset at the laundry when she needs linens.

You'd better not bother with the story; just relax and take in the characters who frequent the house. They include the widow of a wholesale grocer, who is determined that her son shall be a poet; the son, who writes poetry but hates it—even good poetry—and would rather drive the horse-car; another widow, slightly wilted, who spends hours in the bathroom with lotions and creams, trying to get beautiful.

Also, to continue the list, a salty old prospector; a gentleman boarder who lives downstairs but likes to sneak up the outside back stairs to the rooms of a lady boarder (after they are well he can't get out of the habit of starting up the back way); and a New York tomato who has been married twice to and divorced twice from a tycoon from Perth Amboy.

Stuck With a Yodeler

The tycoon pursues this blonde to Tucson to get her back. He wants her back so she will take her mother back, for, it seems, every time there's a divorce the mother comes to live with him—and the mother is a retired vaudevillian who gets drunk and yodels.

Also, of course, there is a daughter of love-making age, so there can be a touch of romance to "Chicken Every Sunday"; and there is a formal Bostonian of Pilgrim ancestry to pay her court. (Mother Phillips, a transplanted Southerner, doesn't like him because he puts on airs and bows from the waist. "There ARE no aristocrats north of Baltimore," she announces.)

There are others, and I like them all, for they are not too greatly overdrawn. A class in dramaturgy might decide that the pace of the comedy slows toward the end, but to me it's an unimportant fault.

The cast is able, picturesque and varied. Miss Phillips, whose career has involved many acid wisecracks, has gentled down. Mr. Williams, as her husband, is an admirable fuzzy-headed schemer, and Jean Gillespie makes an attractive daughter. Ann Thomas, Raymond Van Sickle, Fleming Ward, Hope Emerson, Roy Fant, Katherine Squire and all the rest are happily cast. Howard Bay has designed a dreadful, delightful nightmare of a setting, and Lester Vail's direction strikes me as resourceful.

NEW YORK SUN
April 6, 1944

'Chicken Every Sunday,' Raucous and Floundering, Opens at Henry Miller's

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE house that Henry Miller built gave over its stage last night to a raucous and diffuse play called "Chicken Every Sunday." Taken from the novel of the same title this new piece starts warmly as a comedy of character but it flounders all over the place, becoming something of a comic strip at the beginning of the second act and continuing as such to the finish.

The Miller's new offering, fashioned by Julius J. and Phillip G. Epstein from the novel by Rosemary Taylor, has engaging moments scattered through three acts. It has color and atmosphere and a flock of curious characters. There are enough bizarre people in it to make a side show, but they don't jell as a play.

In "Chicken Every Sunday" you meet the Blachmans and their children and the folk who inhabit their Tucson boarding house, as of 1916. Emily Blachman is patient and striving and holds the family and home together. Husband Jim has a trolley line, a bank and a laundry; he is full of wild and fancy schemes and has also mortgaged the house. The boarders come and go and they include Miss Sally,

"Chicken Every Sunday" continued

who spends hours in the tub (the only tub) and Jake, a cackling old prospector, who has paid up four months in advance and can't be ousted for rhaldry.

Perhaps the fault in the Epstein's play lies to a certain extent in the direction but probably far more in the writing. It seemed during the opening act that there was going to be something quite engaging in "Chicken Every Sunday" but as it rambled on it became more and more a series of disconnected scenes. Many readers of the book will undoubtedly insist that there is an excellent comedy in all those characters of that Arizona boarding house. Perhaps so. But the Epsteins haven't written it and I didn't see it last night.

Edward Gross has given the play an excellent production. The extraordinarily capable Howard Hay has provided one of his most striking sets. And there's talent in the cast. Mary Phillips, an asset to any play, has been giving superior performances in this town ever since George M. Cohan's "Gambling." She now brings her gifted underplaying and sense of timing to the role of Emily Blachman, presiding over her turbulent household and trying to keep her errant husband in line. Rhys Williams, staying in the very theater which sheltered "Harriet" for all those months, does all an actor can with the role of Jim Blachman, a part only half-written, never sufficiently developed.

There is no surer comedy touch in the New York theater of the moment than that of Ann Thomas, who is wasted. She makes a brief appearance and then disappears completely. Roy Fant is very amusing in his characterization of old Jake.

"Chicken Every Sunday" is a disappointment. I am still of the notion that Edgar Selwyn's "The Country Boy" is the best boarding house comedy I ever saw. But let it be reported that there was plenty of laughter at Henry Miller's last night and there were many of the first-nighters who frequently roared.

I didn't.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
April 6, 1944

Chicken Every Sunday a Boarding House Farce

By BURTON RASCOE

IN my opinion, Chicken Every Sunday, which opened at Henry Miller's Theater last night, is a cheap and pointless piece of nothing, with a lot of corny, cowed gags in it, to which I don't object on the ground that they are dirty, but because they are moldy with age.

I was careful to begin the above pronouncement with "In my opinion," because there were quite a few in the audience last night who seem never to have heard these gags before. They laughed quite heartily, time and again; and I don't think all were friends of the management or relatives of the large cast. They laughed, I believe, because some of the stuff struck them as being funny.

I bore up under the whole three acts by concentrating my gaze largely upon Mary Phillips, who has a lovely face and is a highly talented character actress whom I find pleasing to watch; by wondering what such an intelligent and accomplished actor as Rhys Williams privately thinks of Chicken Every Sunday; by noticing that Raymond Van Sickle has such an appealing homely aspect that women are prompted to say "Isn't he sweet!" every time he says or does anything; and by treating my eye to Jean Gillespie, who is a very pretty girl.

This Keystone comedy, without the bathing girls and cops, is the work of what I understand are two of Hollywood's highest salaried scenario writers, Julius J. and Philip G. Epstein, and it is allegedly based on a novel by a Rosemary Taylor. Without having read the

book, I'd deduce that Miss Taylor had seen You Can't Take It With You in the movies and thought it would be nice to write a novel "somewhat along that line," but lay the scenes of the Kaufman-Hart boarding house in Tucson, Ariz.

Emily Blachman in the play has converted her mansion into a boarding house so that the Blachmans "will have a roof over their heads and something to eat" when, as she suspects, the day will come when her imaginative husband overextends himself in his enterprises. He is president of the trolley line, of a bank and of a laundry but always broke and borrowing money for new investments.

Mrs. Blachman's boarders are an old maid schoolteacher; a mysterious can opener salesman, a widow who dresses extravagantly, walks on her toes for health and beauty and spends two hours every day in the only bathroom of the house; an aged mining prospector; a man who visits the school teacher evenings by way of the back stairs; a nymphomaniac; a giantess who is alcoholic and yodels; a widow of a wholesale grocer who makes her son write poetry; and a scion of an old New England family who talks Bostonese and bows from the waist.

The action has to do with Blachman's trying to find a sucker for another one of his enterprises, the effort of the reluctant poet and the Boston boy to win the hand of the Blachman daughter, the separation of the Blachmans on account of the nymphomaniac and their eventual reconciliation.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
April 6, 1944

Boardinghouse Life Theme of New Play

By ROBERT GARLAND

THIS, I fear, is a minority report. To me, "Chicken Every Sunday" is a remarkably unfunny play. But not to the first night congregation assembled in back of, in front of, and all around me last night in Henry Miller's Theatre. The cash customers, if they were cash customers, adored it. Speaking in the language of Broadway, they were rolling in the aisles. I just couldn't manage to roll along with them.

Frankly, this sort of unpopular report irks me. I, of all people, want to be on the "Yes" and more popular side. Last night at Henry Miller's Theatre "Chicken Every Sunday" was most certainly a high-class and hilarious knockout. With every one but me. To my astigmatic eyes, it just isn't funny. Mrs. Blachman's boarding house isn't even amusing when I take off my glasses and look at it forthrightly.

Knowing not the novel from which "Chicken Every Sunday" stems, I'm in no position to report upon the play's authenticity. But, if last night's transcription is up and on the level, "Chicken Every Sunday" must be a dull, duller, duller piece of fiction.

Minority Report

Before "Chicken Every Sunday" found its way into 43rd st., word came from the provinces that it was a very fine comedy indeed. Theatre spies, checking in from Boston, Baltimore and elsewhere, brought word that it was filled to overflowing with lush and unforced laughter; that, like Sir Herbert Tree's "Hamlet," it was funny without being vulgar. Well, taking it squarely as a play, it isn't very funny.

Such a story as "Chicken Every Sunday" manages to tell has to do with an unreal boarding house in an unreal Tucson, Arizona. There, an uncertain Mrs. Emily Blachman holds forth along about the post-war year of 1916. Maybe it was all very funny then. But, in so far as this minority report can go, it wasn't very funny last night at Henry Miller's

Theatre. Heaven knows, players and playwrights tried. But no!

With everybody in sight acting up, or acting down to the lines written by Julius J. and Philip G. Epstein, nothing entertaining really happened. That is to say, not so far as this minority reporter is concerned.

Good Going, Mary

Mary Phillips as Emily Blachman gives a better than good performance. This time she adds humanity to her humor. Her boarding house keeper is a characterization in the round. Not only is she human and a good deal funnier than the well known crutch, but she is also likeable and definitely on the human and happy-go-lucky side. Take it or leave it, there are frequently tears in her Emily Blachman's eyes.

As Jim Blachman, her husband, Rhys Williams works his unhappy head off. Not even in "Harriet" did he work so hard. Admitting the ardor of his endeavor, I must, at the same time, admit his inability to put his acting over. Among the minor members of a large and undistinguished cast, the Jake of Roy Fant, and the Clem of Raymond Van Sickle stand out above the others. There're probably others, but I just can't remember.

Now, as in the beginning, this remains a minority report. To me, "Chicken Every Sunday" is as dull and undesirable as it was fine and funny to last night's cackling congregation.

NEW YORK TIMES
April 6, 1944

THE PLAY IN REVIEW "Chicken Every Sunday"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

FROM Rosemary Taylor's "Chicken Every Sunday" the feverish Epsteins—Julius J. and Philip G.—have fashioned something which might be called a play, or if not exactly that, at least a pretty entertaining evening in the theatre. Probably only the academicians care about plots and motives and sundry ills of the stage; at the end of a spring snowstorm the rest of the world will settle for farce, burlesque, funny lines, and an amount of general wackiness. And the Epsteins have thrown together enough of these to make a chicken stew fair enough for any boarding-house table, and the management has provided the actors to eat it with great gusto. On the whole, O.K., the events at Henry Miller's.

"Chicken Every Sunday" is a series of character sketches and farcical events. The scene is a boarding house in Tucson in 1916, a house run by Emily Blachman, whose husband is the Big Man of the town, Tractor magnate, owner of the big laundry, owner of the big bank. Jim Blachman also has big ideas and habitually speaks with a big nose. The boarders are strange indeed: the woman who takes baths all day long and ties up the bathroom rather completely, a school teacher, a former actress who yodels, sundry Blachman children of assorted ages.

The play bears faint family similarities to both "You Can't Take It With You" and "Life With Father," the parents of "Chicken Every Sunday" resembling the Days, and the boarders and general actions resembling the Sycamores. The Epsteins, however, have not written a play as good as its two cousins, for it lacks the warmth of both of them and it tosses everything overboard in its pursuit of farce. They run harder in "Chicken Every Sunday" and daah up and down more stairs. The Epsteins also could well have weeded out some passages without destroying the evening. But there are undoubtedly enough funny ones to carry those that are not.

The playwrights and Miss Taylor—if she is prepared to recognize her original work—have

been lucky in the members of their company. As Emily Blachman, Mary Phillips is just right. She is aware of the bluster of her husband, both liking and understanding him; she is part shrewd keeper of a boarding house and part sentimentalist. There undoubtedly is a woman who can bring up a family, keep a husband in order and control the boarders along the path of righteousness—or almost

along that path. Rhys Williams also is good as husband Jim; next to Howard Lindsay of "Life With Father" he probably is the best bread-beater in the family business.

Of the others, Joan Gillespie makes an appealing young daughter—when the Epsteins remember that love goes in plays—Hope Emerson has a minor but noisy role as the yodeler, Frank M. Thomas is a stray figure

from the East, and Wyrley Birch has that typical bow from the waist which is Harvard set down in a Tucson boarding house. Lester Vail directed as though "Chicken Every Sunday" were a track meet—which probably it is—and Howard Bay has designed a garishly wonderful setting of a living room. "Chicken Every Sunday" is not all white meat, but there is enough of it on the plate.

"Mrs. January and Mr. Ex"

Comedy by Zoe Akins; directed by Elliott Nugent and Arthur Sircom; settings by Paul Morrison. Presented by Richard Myers at the Belasco Theatre, March 31, 1944.

THE NEW YORK SUN
April 1, 1944

**'Mrs. January and Mr. Ex,'
Presented at the Belasco,
Is Scanty, Well Acted**

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE amazingly youthful Billie Burke and the droll and ever-recurrent Frank Craven are pleasantly teamed in the new Zoe Akins comedy, "Mrs. January and Mr. Ex," greeted last evening by an eager audience at the Belasco. The play is far from Miss Akins's best.

There is some bright dialogue in the Belasco's new offering. There is a notion in it, too, but Miss Akins did not write the notion into a good play. It is apparent that the author, the director, Elliott Nugent, and the producer, Richard Myers, have worked strenuously to get this comedy in shape, but its early promise is not sustained. The play falls off steadily after an attractive first act.

But whatever the shortcomings of "Mrs. January and Mr. Ex" all of us should be grateful to Mr. Meyers for bringing Miss Burke and Mr. Craven back to the Broadway stage. I have beheld Miss Burke in many roles since she captivated a Southern city years ago in a now forgotten comedy called "Jerry." And as she came forth last evening as Lily January, wealthy and giddy and flighty, she seemed not to have aged a year or a day or a play. Miss Burke's role is a long one and she plays it charmingly. And there are many moments when she is struggling with no play at all. Mr. Craven, with considerably less to do, is again his amiable, expert and beguiling self.

The story of the new Akins play is slight. Lily January, a woman of charming nonsense, who has lived abroad for twenty years and who has had three husbands, is vaguely communistic in her theories. She rents a New England summer cottage to practice poverty and to a \$40-a-month, two-family house she brings trunks, servants, children. It so happens that the cottage is owned by a Republican who, some time prior to the Roosevelt reign (if you can remember that far) had four years in the White House. The play, then, concerns Mrs. January and her Mr. Ex and their romance, which is spread thinly over three acts.

Miss Burke, as the vacuous and distracted theorist, plays unflinchingly throughout the evening. Mr. Craven, as the dry, tactful and decidedly susceptible Martin Luther Cooper, frequently suggests Calvin Coolidge in speech and manner. For most of the way Miss Akins's play belongs almost entirely to the two leading characters, Nicholas Joy, an actor who always comes through, is bland and believable enough as the brother of the batty Mrs. January. The oncoming Barbara Bel Geddes gives spirit and excellent reading to the role of the daughter, one of the three children reared by Mrs. January to be quar-

THE CAST

Miss Belle.....	Helen Carey
Charley Blaine.....	Edward Nannary
Stevens.....	Phil Sheridan
Mrs. January, nee January.....	Billie Burke
Martin Luther Cooper.....	Frank Craven
First Expressman.....	Roderick Winchell
Second Expressman.....	Robert F. Simon
Germaine.....	Theresa Quadri
Wilhelmina.....	Barbara Bel Geddes
Rolando.....	Bobby Perez
Carey.....	Henry Barnard
Burdette.....	Henry Vincent
Clancy.....	Dorothy Lambert
John Deacon January.....	Nicholas Joy
Miss Peck.....	Susanna Garnett

relsome so that they can cope with a combative world.

I feel that Elliott Nugent has done well with the direction when he had a play, or part of a play, to direct. Paul Morrison has provided a cottage setting that has the real New England look.

Zoe Akins has written numerous plays for the New York theater. This "Mrs. January and Mr. Ex" contains some of her best dialogue. There are some buoyant moments in it and wistful ones, too, as when Mr. Ex is talking about his New England farm and wondering how he and Mrs. January might make out on \$8,000 a year.

But, taken as a whole, the new Akins play is a scanty one, and loosely constructed. It doesn't hold up after a good beginning. I wish Miss Akins could have done more with a delightful notion.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM

April 1, 1944

Akins' Red Rich

Satire Lags a Bit

By BURTON RASCOE

ZOE AKINS' new comedy, Mrs. January and Mr. Ex, starring Billie Burke and Frank Craven, which opened at the Belasco last night, is a nice, inoffensive little divertimento, with some amusing spots in it, but I can't say I'm at all enthusiastic about it.

I am sorry about this, too; for I seem to share Miss Akins' social and political sentiments, made evident in this play. I only wish her propaganda for our ideas hadn't been made such a bore.

In spite of several very sound observations made by Mr. Craven in a droll and effective manner during the first act, the thing starts out badly. Most of this act is a satire on the sort of rich women who live extravagantly on income from inherited wealth and yet who, during the heyday of the Popular Front, espoused Communism like a new artistic vogue, such as Cubism and Surrealism, and not only learned all Communist catchphrases from the Stalinist organizers who made use

of them, but believed, as sincerely as they could believe in anything that was only a temporary fad with them, that they were engaged in a noble ride on the wave of the future.

Damage Already Done

But the time for satire on that sort of thing was 10 years ago. The damage those feather-brained females did, already has been done. They contributed millions (in the aggregate) to the support of doctrines whose aim was not merely to throw the likes of them on the ash-heap (which is probably where they belonged) but to destroy representative government and what freedom and democracy we have so far been able to achieve under the principals on which this republic was founded. It is going to take years of work by the FBI, unceasing vigilance on the part of the voters, and a long burden of heavy taxes to overcome the damage these females and their Communist exploiters did—if it ever is overcome.

The satire in that first act has validity and point, but it is dated. Miss Akins has her rattle-pate (Billie Burke) fancy herself as very like Marie Antoinette, when that bird-brain espoused the doctrines of Jean Jacques Rousseau's New Heloise and the Social Contract (or thought she espoused them) by giving fetes champetres (with the taxpayers' money) on the lawns of Versailles with herself and other court ladies dressed as dairymaids in gowns designed after Boucher, Fragonard and Watteau.

Story Unfolds

The wealthy and much-divorced Mrs. January—with children by husbands who were, respectively, American, English and Italian—unlike Marie Antoinette, foresees the coming revolution and prepares for it. She trains her children to be selfish, unprincipled and rude "so that they may get along among their inferiors," and she takes a \$40-a-month cottage in a small New England town (bringing 14 trunks, a cook, a butler and a French maid, as well as her brats) in order "to get used to doing without," after the revolution comes.

Miss Burke's chatter (so familiar, in character, to movie-goers) becomes wearisome in this first act; but, still, this play has promise then, if only because Mr. Craven (as Mr. Ex, that is, Mr. Ex-President of the USA, now in quiet retirement) is allowed to break in once in a while with some sage American common sense. . . . Miss Burke wows Mr. Craven; her money keeps him cautiously out of her coils; she is on the point of losing her money, because of her trustee-brother's speculations, whereupon her servants and her children walk out on her; the Republican party "drafts" Mr. Ex, just when he is about to marry Mrs. January, and he is about to put the country's good above his own happiness (since he is of the old-fashioned belief that a presidential candidate's marrying a divorcee will lose votes) when everything turns out happily all around. He gets the nomination and a rich wife, to boot.

Miss Burke is a darling; I adore her. Mr. Craven, as always, is pleasant to watch and listen to. Their support is only fair. And I wish Miss Akins' ideas were presented with more zip and credibility.

"Mrs. January and Mr. Ex" continued

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
April 1, 1944

Flimsy Whimsy

By HOWARD BARNES

SHREWD acting is the chief distinction of the new play at the Belasco. Billie Burke and Frank Craven fight bad lines and feeble situations so valiantly in "Mrs. January and Mr. Ex" that it would be pleasant to report that the campaign was a triumph. The truth is that this Zoe Akins farce has so little comic substance that the stars are going it alone throughout most of the three acts. Between them they generate quite a bit of fun out of a flimsy whimsy, but they have tough assignments.

For Miss Akins has elaborated a farcical notion in a definitely pedestrian fashion. The idea of having a wealthy matron decide to show her children by various marriages the seamier side of life is filled with antic potentialities. Her romance with a supposed ex-president who combines the best features of Calvin Coolidge and Wendell L. Willkie constitutes a wonderful springboard for bravura acting. The acting is there in "Mrs. January and Mr. Ex." It is rarely backed up by good writing.

When Miss Burke, as the wisely foolish lady who anticipates a real social revolution, is coping with a little house in New England and falling in love with her granite-faced landlord, the play has occasional passages of feeling as well as humor. When she is asked to flutter through such a line as "I'm just a needle in a woodpile," the doings at the Belasco wilt perceptibly. Craven, with his customary restraint, has more luck with a contrived script, but even he has more than one bad moment before the preposterous ending of the show.

The best scenes obviously are those in which Miss Burke and Craven are considering this world we live in from violently opposing points of view. The dinner party she arranges after they have become engaged has hilarious overtones. There are effective moments in other sections where the brilliance of the stars saves the particular situation. Too much of "Mrs. January and Mr. Ex" is wanting in wit and dramatic carpentry. Nicholas Joy, Barbara Bel Geddes, Bobby Perez and Edward Naumoff fill in minor roles, but they are very much at the mercy of the lines. Elliott Nugent and Arthur Sircorn divide credit for the staging of the comedy. They seem to have done their best to keep the stars down stage center and the whimsy palatable.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
April 1, 1944

'Mrs. January' Seen

At Belasco Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

THE co-starring of Billie Burke and Frank Craven in Zoe Akins' new comedy was a stroke of genius on the part of someone, somewhere. As a matter of fact, I don't exactly see how "Mrs. January and Mr. Ex" could get along without them. But, getting along with them, is pretty generally a theatrical delight, a slyly satiric bit of make-believe with political, not to say pathetic, on-stage undertones.

And, whisper it not in the Westchester, Long Island and Park Avenue of Miss Akins' post-Missouri adoption, there is also social significance in the new arrival at the Belasco. Even so, the every-inch-a-lady dramatist is

careful to spell "social significance" with lower case "s" so as not to frighten the carriage trade away. Believe it or not, you can eat your communism in 44th Street, and have it too.

In "Mrs. January and Mr. Ex," it's three cheers for the red, white and blue—red for the Russians, white for us, and blue for the way dissenters are going to feel about it.

Wealthy Spartans

On the surface, the Billie Burke-Frank Craven starring vehicle is all about an addlepated daughter-of-the-rich who decides to beat the oncoming revolution to its own arrival. In the midst of wealth, beyond all knowing, she picks up her children, which are three, her servants, which are unnumbered, and her luggage, which is fabulous, and moves into a forty-dollars-a-month house in a small New England village.

She is practicing post-war living in advance, acclimatizing herself and her offspring to a civilization which has not, as yet, arrived. For her retinue—her maid, her butler, her chauffeur, her cook, her laundress and all the rest of them—she takes over the residential showplace of the village. They must have the comforts to which, as servants, they have been accustomed, while she, her sons and her daughter, must be Spartans.

And the owner of the forty-dollars-a-month house into which she and her unsympathetic progeny are installed is Martin Luther Cooper, a former President of the United States, a widower, a Republican and—

January Tears

Yes, that's what happens. But not before Billie Burke has given a truly Burke-ian performance, with a fluttering of mind, a fluttering of hands, and a fluttering of on-stage finances delectable to behold. Yet, as I had not altogether expected, there is honest and not unmoving pathos beneath Miss Burke's light and airy fun-making. There are times when Mrs. January stirs up your tears.

Frank Craven, the Mr. Ex of the title, underplays with his well-known effective skill. Being one of the most gifted listeners on the American stage, he is perfect as the Coolidge-like ex-President for whom Mrs. January has set her cap—which, in the last act at the Belasco, turns out to be a crown. Norman Bel Geddes' daughter Barbara is the most impressive of Mrs. January's international children.

Frankly, I'm not greatly impressed by Elliott Nugent's remote-control direction. But, in spite of it, I thoroughly enjoyed "Mrs. January and Mr. Ex." It's wise. It's witty. And it's wonderfully well-acted in the title roles.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

April 1, 1944

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Mrs. January and Mr. Ex"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

SINCE politics are in the air, along with April, list Frank Craven and Billie Burke as among Broadway's favorite sons and daughters. Unfortunately in most elections, there is more to the matter than just the candidates; there also are platforms. Set it down with considerable regret, then, that "Mrs. January and Mr. Ex," in which they arrived at the Belasco last evening, is not a platform worthy of two excellent talents. They struggle with Zoe Akins' latest play; they give it every chance, but it remains talkative and long and gets nowhere in particular; and at least one act probably deserves only the sad description of a bore. Mr. Craven and Miss Burke deserve better of the politicians.

Miss Akins' basic idea is a good one. She is telling of a rich, often married woman who, having embraced communism, moves to

the country to learn how to live more simply. She rents half of a double house, the other half being occupied by Mr. Ex, he being an ex-Republican President given to tactfulness and writing. The pair of them decide marriage might be a good idea, and while the plans for that go forward, Mr. Ex makes a speech and the convention in Chicago decides he must be drafted for another term. But while her main idea has possibilities, Miss Akins permits herself to get snarled in as many tangles as some political platforms have offered in the past.

Mrs. January, during the course of her European marriages, has acquired three children from various sources, and while children are agreeable, these three do not help the play. Miss Akins also drops the communism phase of her leading character in order to take up another plot having to do with the January family fortunes—leaving both pretty well suspended. The dialogue for the most part does not sparkle as it should, with Mr. Craven, who is a specialist in terse, wry speeches, being forced to give a number of long, solemn ones; and Miss Burke, a specialist in flightiness, not being consistently flighty. "Mrs. January and Mr. Ex" needs, in short, a good deal of tightening.

Mr. Craven is his usual self, which means slightly unpressed and wholly casual, and he obviously belongs in the White House. Miss Burke last evening seemed to be trying a little too much, as though she realized the limitations of the script and hoped to help it along by sheer exertion and good-will. Barbara Bel Geddes is pretty and attractive as one of the children, and Nicholas Joy is forthright as the January brother who did strange things with the family fortune. Elliott Nugent and Arthur Sircorn directed, with a setting by Paul Morrison.

Although Mr. Craven is a great man, the Republicans for the moment had better stay with Mr. Willkie or Governor Dewey.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

April 1, 1944

Billie Burke and Frank

Craven Hypo 'Mrs.

January and Mr. Ex'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

NO play starring two such fetching comedians as Billie Burke and Frank Craven can be brushed off, dismissed or hooted at. They could have made something of "The Snark Was a Boojum" or "Lady Behave"—and they make "Mrs. January and Mr. Ex" much more enjoyable than it has a right to be.

This comedy, which arrived at the Belasco last night, needs a couple of gallons of plasma; but what there is of it is enough to permit Miss Burke and Mr. Craven to be amusing. When there is no plot, which is most of the time, the two principals manage to make it fairly interesting just by the contrast in their methods and equipment.

Miss Burke, thank our lucky stars, is beautiful, graceful, fluttery, intensely feminine and a complete expert at letting a funny line drift away from her, so it's all the more amusing for having escaped. Craven is Craven and an opposite number—dead-panned, careful, low-voiced and just as unctuous as he was in "Our Town." Matching the two is a plot in itself—and a lucky thing this is.

Come the Revolution . . .

Zoe Akins had a serviceable idea for "Mrs. January and Mr. Ex," but it is so completely covered in the first two acts that it needs needling in the third—and doesn't get it. Her idea is to have a rich, flutter-brained Billie Burke move into the modest, New England home of Calvin Coolidge and bring love to the modest, New England Coolidge heart.

Miss Burke, it seems, has decided she will

practice up for the revolution, so she closes her town houses and Newport chateaux and rents a half of a two-family house for \$40 a month. Mr. Craven, the landlord, is an ex-President who has been living driftily but contentedly on \$3,000 a year.

Like more than one person of great wealth, Miss Burke thinks she's a Communist; some day, she believes, nobody will have anything, and she is facing this prospect with gallant gooiiness. She moves into the half-house, which has three bedrooms, with 14 trunks, a jewel case, a French maid, a cook, a butler, a chauffeur and three children who are relics of three marriages.

Love Comes to a Yankee

She speaks of her Italian child and her English child and of her views on everything, at a hundred words a minute—and she fascinates the monosyllabic ex-President.

Love blossoms, of course, but one trouble with the comedy is that the blossoming is so obvious that there is not much kick in it; the other trouble with the play is that Miss Akins has been unable to contrive any serious threat to the romance. Miss Burke at one point loses her servants and thinks she has lost her money, but I couldn't worry because I knew Zoe Akins wouldn't let anybody be REALLY poor. At another point it looks as though Mr. Craven wouldn't marry Miss Burke after all, because he's being drafted to run for the Presidency again; but I couldn't fret my pretty head about this one, either, because it didn't seem to be very sensible.

Among several attractive people in the company are Nicholas Joy, Barbara Bel Geddes, Henry Barnard and Susana Garnett. A New England room by Paul Morrison is the setting, and Hollywood's Adrian has made some beautiful and smartly funny clothes for Miss Burke. Elliott Nugent and Arthur Sircorn share directing credit.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM

April 2, 1944

Mrs. January Talks On & On

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

PLAYS with whimsical titles are always to be approached with mild misgivings, and in the case of *Mrs. January and Mr. Ex*, the misgivings are all too well-founded. Zoe Akins has been kind enough in her new comedy to provide the Republican Party with a stage candidate for President, but it would have been even kinder of her to have provided Broadway with a play. *Mrs. January* is hardly more than an opportunity for Billie Burke to chatter her pretty head off and for Frank Craven to listen and fall in love with her. Miss Burke is an old hand at hen-brained jabber, but for all that the evening is decidedly trying. Miss Akins has sprinkled some amusing enough lines about, but they merely punctuate the general boredom; they do not alleviate it.

The play presents a rich, much-married and giddy lady with queer radical notions that she apparently culled from *Vogue* who—convinced there will be a revolution after the war—decides to "practice poverty" in advance. For \$40 a month she rents half of a house in a New England town. Her landlord is a former President of the U. S., a vaguely Coolidge-like widower who is appalled by her politics but entranced by her person. The plot is pretty much of a horse that refuses to budge, but with a frantic third-act use of the whip Miss Akins manages to get the pair formally engaged and to put the happy swain back into presidential harness. Apparently his betrothed's sheaf of divorces, not to speak of her radical ideas, is nothing that the Republican leaders view with the slightest alarm.

Since virtually nothing happens for three acts, Miss Akins has ample time to take satirical pokes at both the lady's politics and the gentleman's. But *Mrs. January* is much less

satire than burlesque. It's birdbrained heroine is played for all she is worth, and much more than she is worth. For an act she is tolerably entertaining; after that it is like listening to a screechy phonograph record played over and over.

There's no reason to blame Billie Burke who went through her part as it was written. And Frank Craven was pleasant enough. But the evening seemed unusually long.

THE NEW YORK POST

April 1, 1944

Billie Burke and Frank Craven Star in 'Mrs. January and Mr. Ex'

By WILLELLA WALDORF

WHEN Billie Burke appeared on Broadway about a year ago in an incredibly inept drama entitled "This Rock," she was almost as distressing as the play. Last night at the Belasco, however, she redeemed herself by injecting an amazing amount of sparkle and hilarity into a foolish little comedy by Zoe Akins called "Mrs. January and Mr. Ex."

With a Presidential campaign looming up in the distance and a strong scent of politics in the air, Miss Akins is concerned with a rattle-brained lady of prodigious wealth who fancies herself a determined radical. Convinced that the Revolution is coming after the war, or even sooner, she rents a \$40-a-month house in a small New England town and proceeds to practice being poor to the disgust of her three children, butler, cook, chauffeur and French maid.

Her landlord, as it happens, is a gentleman of few words known as Martin Luther Cooper. The name is faintly familiar to Mrs.

January, but she can't think why, since he admits he never visited the Riviera. It turns out that Mr. Cooper, a rock-bound Republican, was once President of the United States.

None too keen on renting part of his two-family house to Mrs. January, who strikes him as a highly suspicious person, Mr. Cooper protests mildly that he doesn't need the money.

"Nonsense!" is Mrs. January's reply. "Everybody needs money nowadays. Even the poor."

Drafted by the C.O.P.

This remark so intrigues the dour ex-President that he keeps dropping in for a dose of his charming tenant's somewhat scrambled Communism until he finally makes a speech before the Young Republicans that is positively liberal in tone, even faintly spiced with Mrs. January's romantic notions of the French Revolution.

So dazed are the Republicans that they forthwith draft him as their nominee in the coming struggle to down the New Deal. There is material for satire in this giddy situation, but Miss Akins is no satirist. She is bent merely upon spinning out a farce to fit the sort of idiotic female Miss Burke has been playing so long in the movies, with an equally suitable role for Mr. Craven.

"Mrs. January and Mr. Ex" is chiefly a two-character play, for the other people who wander in and out are nothing more than stooges. There was a time in the second act when we thought the whole business was going to stop and the stage manager come out with a sign reading: "Sorry. Author has run down. Money back at box-office."

But at crucial moments, Miss Burke was always ready to rush in, dressed like Marie Antoinette, to wrestle daintily with the vacuum cleaner, pausing to tell the children that it really didn't matter whether they'd lost their money or not. Just think how many people have had to close their homes and move to the Plaza or the Ritz!

No masterpiece this, but often very funny in its addle-pated fashion, with Miss Burke and Mr. Craven perfectly cast.

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